

CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Theatre Diary

Another spurt in Broadway business reported by the dozen current shows. With the new season just 2 weeks ahead a half dozen shows are already in rehearsal. In addition, Oklahoma opens a 5 week run at the City Center August 31, Guys and Dolls return to the 46th St. Theatre August 24 after a successful 8 week Washington, D.C. run, and Hazel Flagg re-opens at the Hellinger September 1.

Strawhat Tryouts

To Hell With Orpheus, St. John Terrell's production of the Offenbach operetta with a book which Edward Eager adapted from Ring Lardner, Sr's English version of the original, debuted at the summer producer's Lambertville, N.J. Music Circus. Two NY critics trekked to see production, but failed to predict a Broadway success for it. Dash, Women's Wear, okayed it as amusing summer fare, which would need more ballet, more amplitude in the choral work and greater speed in the Earth part of this mockery of Olympus before a NY try. Though Kerr, Herald Tribune, agreed that original music was just what you expect from Offenbach, gay, melodic and effortlessly bubbling, and the cast animated and attractive, the book seems like a collegiate parody. Only some eminently serviceable lyrics are worthwhile salvaging from the present book.

On Cobweb Twine, the first play by a young actress Anna Marie Barlow, which was produced at Sea Cliff, LI, Summer Theatre, virtuoso playing by a fine cast, okays Coleman, Mirror. Cast of play about French Quarter of New Orleans during the Mardi Gras features Mildred Natwick and Jeffrey Lynn... See You Tomorrow, press agent Ned Armstrong's new play shown at Putnam County, NY, Playhouse, has the making of a good show in its theme, but needs almost a complete rewrite to make it a salable item, advises McDonald, Billboard... The Starcross Story, a drama by Diana Morgan tried out at Westport, Conn, Country Playhouse, rates as a potential Broadway winner, okays Doul, Variety. Eve LeG allienne, Faye Emerson and Ona Munson head cast and all do fine jobs in story concerning the widows of a mountain climbing expedition... Two musical tries on the summer circuit were panned by Variety muggs: Solomon Grundy at the Rochester, NY Arena Theatre, and Great Scott, at the Great Neck, LI, Summer Playhouse. Both were termed acceptable for their own area, but not much interest elsewhere.

London Report

The 2 London productions which Curran, Nation, liked the best were the revivals of Henry V-Part 3 and Shaw's The Apple Cart. The Shakespeare drama was produced by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre playing at the Old Vic and was made so modern it seemed that it was part of the audience's family history. While the Shaw comedy, which was a bore in NY in 1930, now seems a delightfully civilized prank... The most interesting work Watts, Post, saw in London was The Glorious Days starring Anna Neagle; though he thinks "incredible" is the proper adjective. Panned by all the British critics it is still running after a year, with the star portraying English women through the centuries. Star gave a party for the London critics on the eve of the musical history's first anniversary. Though show was panned, Baxter, Evening Express, did point out in his original review that in spite of its demerits the show would be a success with the public that goes to the theatre to enjoy itself. A sort of British Wish You Were Here.

' Village Theatre '

Circle in the Square announces that a new theatrical workshop will be held weekly Starting September 14 with Jose Quintero as director.

Jack Garfein will be the director of Clare Heller's production of End as A Man Calder Willingham's adaption of his own controversial novel to be presented at Theatre de Lys starting Sept 15. Albert Dekker is being sought for the leading role

' Yiddish Theatre '

Menachem Rubin, the Yiddish actor, has leased the Parkway Theatre, Brooklyn, for a series of Yiddish folk plays to be presented this season. Harry Kalmanowitz's In Every Home will be the first production early in September.

' Vaudeville '

The Roxy will drop its stage shows in September with the opening of "The Robe." 25 musicians and 35 AGWA members will be effected by the switch in policy.

Martin & Lewis open for a 2 week run at the Paramount starting August 26. 4 Step Brothers, Polly Bergen and Dick Stable and his orchestra are also on the bill... Wally Vernon heads the new Palace show. Also on vaude program are The Drifters, Tanya, Don Cummings, the Cingaroos, Cecil & Shirley, Wiley & Michael Mann, and Gillette & Richards. Jo Lombardi's orchestra provides background, per usual.

' Outdoor Pageants '

President Eisenhower promises to be the No 1 actor in nation when he plays a "bit" part in a New Orleans outdoor pageant this fall marking the anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase. He will appear in 1 performance as the US representative.

' Theatre Record Comments '

"Music of Cole Porter" (Columbia) by Andre Kostelanetz Orchestra rated an 84 from Billboard's staff of critics. Trade paper predicted disc will be a best seller.

"Can-Can" & "Me & Juliet" Selections- (Decca) played by Gordon Jenkins Orchesta, but with no vocalists, receives a nice treatment, okays Bagar, World Telegram & Sun. "New Moon" (Decca) selections with Thomas Hayward, Jane Wilson and Victor Young's orchestra was also okayed by the WT&S music critic. Melodious charms of the original operatta are so many and so potent that the songs from the show still linger on.

"Shakespeare Pronunciation" (Yale University Press-Records), the LP record made by Professor Kokeritz, Yale, to illustrate his own book, was recommended for English teachers only plus some of the Shakespeare loving public who want to know how Richard Burbage might have sounded, comments Gray, Saturday Review. If the Yale professor is right, the original Shakespeare players sounded a bit like Barry Fitzgerald in their accents.

"The Importance of Being Earnest" (Theatre Masterworks) makes an extremely fine album, recommends "R.P", Times. With Maurice Evans, Leueen MacGrath and Stella Andrew make the Wilde classic come across as disembodied wit. The play is as well directed and even more beautifully spoken than the firm's 1st disc "Hedda Gabbler."

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 ' Green Room Department '

GOOD & LAZY...There is no better job than being a drama critic, admits Watts, Post, for the man not exactly bursting with energy, who at the same time is not averse to exerting a bit of brief authority and wants to fool his fellows into the belief that he is something of a man of action. The reason for this confession of a lazy man is that Watts will file 6 columns per week until Post drama editor Vernon Rice returns to full time duty.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...The resentment among "angels" against certain financial and operating practices of some producers may be a negative factor in the coming Broadway season, surmises Hobe, Variety...How long will Broadway attract stars when a leading player of a comedy hit can earn as much \$\$\$ for one TV quiz appearance as she does for 8 performances on stage, asks O'Brian, Journal American...The fear that St. John Terrell's new title for the Offenbach operetta "To Hell With Orpheus" might backfire into some saying to hell with Terrell was dismissed by the producer's aides, reports McHarry, News.

ANTI-FAGAN...Myron Fagan, the producer and author of Red Rainbow, fails to include some salient facts in the promotion letters being mailed, charges Gray, Post. These include the fact that Gerald L K Smith takes credit for starting Fagan on his Red hunting career, and that Fagan went off the deep end and named practically every star in Hollywood as Red or pro-Communist. Gray doubts if readers will get letters from Fagan's "Committee for Americanism in the Theatre" if they are pro-UN, pro union, or anti-McCarthy.

COLUMN TIPS...Palace and Warner movie houses may be used as legit theatres this season, hears Variety...A tax snag is holding up progress on Billy Rose's proposed Lively Arts Foundation, discovers Zolotow, Times..."Julius Caesar" film at the Booth isn't filled at matinees, reports Farrell, World Telegram & Sun.

MURDER BUSINESS...Mayhem used to be a stage staple that served as a bread and butter basis on which theatrical finances might rest, recalls Burr, Playbill. Murder plays brought back their investments and a bit more. They have been missed by those peasants among us, he feels, whose earth bound lungs are unfit to breathe exclusively the rarified air of High Art. The current success of Dial M For Murder is an indication that a few more melodramas, as judiciously chosen and as excellently produced, might bring cash to the box office and entertainment to audiences.

THEATRE GOING...NY stage's biggest problem is finding tomorrow's audience, points out Manchester, Stage, who notes the decline of the second balcony fan...Theatre fans this season, predicts Chapman, News, will want to see only the sockeroo hits guaranteed by rave reviews and will be discouragingly indifferent to the play or musical that got mixed notices.

PRO LABELING GIRLS...The idea to label chorus girls, like football players, so the old fellows, like himself, can identify them, is one of the constructive ideas of George Jean Nathan that Watts, Post, supports.

 ' Pros & Cons by 'MK' '

Whatever happened to the 7 30 PM curtain? Last season it was given an unfair and hurried try. But the fact remains that many patrons arrive at the theatre from 1 hour to 30 minutes before curtain time. And the fact also remains that no matter how

how early the final curtain falls, some always leave early to catch trains. Thus there is a portion of the audience which wants and needs earlier curtains. A plan should be evolved to satisfy them.

' NYC Theatre News Round Up '

The 1953-54 New York theatre season may or may not be one of the most interesting in years, but it is bound to be one of the most controversial. With the first signs of cool weather in NY tempers are already beginning to flare over the hectic theatre jam. Last week it was the dispute between the producers of Late Love and Escapade over who legally has booked the 48th St. Theatre. Michael Abbott, the producer of Late Love has threatened to institute injunction proceedings against the theatre owner. The agent for the theatre, Saul Lancourt claims that he didn't counter sign the Late Love contract. Both shows are still planning to open at the theatre.

This week's dispute is over opening dates. Anna Russell and Her Little Show had its sights on opening September 8. The producers of the revue starring the British comedian claim that this date was granted them by James Reilly, League of NY theatres Secretary. But with the announced opening of Carnival in Flanders September 8 the producers of the Russell revue were forced to switch their opening to September 7. Arthur Klein, co-producer of the Russell revue, charges the League with being "Unehtical." Klein also charges that Lee Shubert "controls" the League and that its usurping the Russell premiere date is the "most unethical act I have experienced in the theatre for a long time." The reason the Shuberts are so interested in the opening date of Carnival in Flanders, Klein claims, is that they have money invested in the musical. Reilly points out that the League merely lists opening dates, but has no control over its members in making them change when a conflict arises.

Plays

3 incoming Broadway shows changed their names this week. St. John Terrell tabbed his modern version of the Orpheus legend, with music by Offenbach, To Hell With Orpheus, when it had been called Orpheus in the Underworld. The Fritz Hochwalder play which Walter Chrysler, jr is producing switched its title from On Earth As in Heaven to The Strong Are Lonely. While the new Edward Chodorov comedy has changed its title from Oh Men, Oh Women to the more fascinating title of The Magic Couch... August 31 to September 6 has been named "Rodgers & Hammerstein Week" by Mayor Impellitteri.

People

Ronny Graham, New Faces, faces expulsion from Equity on charges of Leonard Sillman. Producer claims actor-author walked out without any explanation, while Graham claims he was sick. Lionel Stander, Pal Joey, was fired from cast after a series of alleged misdemeanors. Both shows are in Chicago, but will close this week... Neil Hamilton has been signed for Late Love, which stars Arlene Francis and Lucile Watson. Alexander Knox is not in the cast, as some gremlin reported here last week.

Theatre Film Notes

Tennessee Williams and Paul Bowles will film the former's original screen play "Summer Storm" in Italy with Farley Granger... David O Selznick will film Bell, Book and Candle with Jennifer Jones in the lead... Dolores Gray has signed a long term contract with MGM... Fred Zinnemann will direct the 3 D Oklahoma.

Theatre TV Notes

The drama department of the University of North Carolina will be the subject of one of the TV films shown on CBS TV "The Search"... The Shakespeare course to be given by Dr. Frank C Baxter, University of Southern California, which will be telecast this fall for full college credit on KNXT TV, Hollywood, will be made available, via kine-scope, to educational TV stations on request.

